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ABSTRACT

Bullying is an interaction which establishes group identity, dominance, and status at the expense of the victim; therefore, it is only through the development of values such as empathy, consideration, and unselfishness that the bully is likely to relinquish the behavior and function differently in a social setting. By involving peers, it is possible to enhance the empathic responses of healthy members of the group, in turn affecting the behavior of the group leader who no longer has the group's consent to bully. The "No Blame" approach is described in a 7-step process entailing: (1) interviewing the victim about his or her feelings; (2) convening a meeting with people involved, including bystanders and others in collusion with the behavior; (3) explaining the problem to the group, focusing on the victim's feeling and not allocating blame; (4) sharing responsibility through the teacher's statement that she/he knows that the group is responsible and can take action; (5) asking the group for suggestions to help the victim feel better; (6) giving responsibility for solving the problem to the group; and (7) meeting with the group again, including the victim, to monitor bullying and keep the students involved. Evaluation of this intervention in three studies indicates that the no-blame approach was successful at the primary and secondary level. (Contains 12 references.) (KB)

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The No Blame Approach to Bullying.

A Paper presented to the British Association for the Advancement of Science
1994 Meeting - 'Science in the World Around Us.'
Psychology Section - Coping with Challenging Behaviour
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by
Barbara Maines and George Robinson

The literature on bullying is beginning to proliferate. The trouble is that most of it offers data on percentages of bullies and victims or elegant conceptual analyses of what might be the root causes in psychological, sociological or pedagogical terms. What few publications yet do, is to offer individual teachers, pupils or schools practical advice on how to deal with this many-headed hydra.

Bob Burden - Special Children September 1991

What is Bullying?

Not every act of aggression or nastiness is bullying and it is important to define the particular behaviours and processes before planning helpful interventions. Bullying is a relationship between individuals or groups over a period of time during which one party behaves in a way which might meet needs for excitement, status, material gain or group process without recognising or meeting the needs and rights of the other people/person who are harmed by the behaviour. The person or group that is harmed does not have the resources, status, skill, or ability, to counteract or stop the harmful behaviour.

Occasional acts of aggression would not be described as bullying unless there is a continuing fear or torment for the victims. It is also important to differentiate bullying from "war-like" behaviours where opposing groups confront each other because they have different belief systems or territorial claims. These values may be strongly held through generations and are very resistant to change.

We do not differentiate between "bullying - by an individual" and "mobbing - by a group" discussed by Anatol Pikas (1989). This is because we are describing situations in which, even if the bully is operating solo, her behaviour is usually witnessed in some way by others. If the witness supports the bully, however passive that support might be, then the behaviour is in some way owned by the whole group and the strengths of the group can be enabled in order to confront the behaviour. Where the bullying occurs in true secrecy, unknown to any witness other than the victim, then interventions are unlikely unless the behaviour is reported by the victim.

We have been to several workshops and heard accounts of incidents which have served to confirm our worry about the scale and seriousness of bullying at a group and institutional level. This article sets a challenge to its readers. We believe that the interventions which are likely to combat bullying in schools demand much more from us than the impeccable intention to convey to bullies that their behaviour is unacceptable.

Defining the terms

Our definitions are:

BULLY - a person or group behaving in a way which might meet needs for excitement, status, material gain or group process and does not recognise or meet the needs and rights of the other people/person who are harmed by the behaviour.

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VICTIM - a person or group that is harmed by the behaviour of others and who does not have the resources, status, skill, ability, to counteract or stop the harmful behaviour.

Bullying is "normal."

Many of those reading this article will have had some close relationship with a very young baby at some time in their lives and they will remember the self-centred and relentlessly demanding behaviour exhibited by a tiny, dependent human being. If babies were big and parents small then parents would undoubtedly be bullied! You may also remember if you are a parent or have had close relationships with young children, the first time that the child was upset or cried, not because some need or demand of their own was un-met, but because of a sadness or hurt felt on behalf of another person or creature. This emergence of "empathy" is a complex step in social and emotional development and it is upon these feelings that kind and unselfish behaviours are based.

We believe that it is not helpful to regard bullying as abnormal or evil. Many of us will remember standing back and at least colluding with, if not participating in, some hurtful behaviour towards another person because it increased our own sense of belonging or identity that we were not the one being rejected. Parents and teachers will often observe very nice kids behaving in a very nasty way when the need to belong to a group of peers was an over-riding factor. Today's young people living in affluent countries are subjected to strong pressure by the manufacturers of trendy clothes and toys. Wearing the right trainers is all important but they are only the right trainers if someone else isn't wearing them!

A willingness to step outside a peer group and stand alongside someone who is rejected and harmed takes strength and courage. It puts the "rescuer" at risk of rejection herself and the success of her stand is likely to depend upon her social or physical status. We are likely then to take this risk only when we identify with the distress of the victim and when we feel that our intervention is likely to bring about some change; when we feel involved and powerful. Witnesses of bullying or those who care for the victims might have very strong feelings of anger and a need to punish the perpetrators. If an adult who is in a position of power uses her authority to stop the bullying then it may have a short term effect upon that particular situation but it is unlikely to change the status or identity of the bully and victim. There may well be a risk that the victim is further damaged because the bully was thwarted.... "I will get you later!"

This article will suggest that the primary focus of our plan to reduce bullying should be upon the feelings and status of the bully. By involving the peer group, colluders and bystanders, it is possible to enhance the empathic responses of healthy members of the group. This in turn has an effect on the behaviour of the group leader who no longer has the group's consent to behave in a bullying manner.

Data Collection and Whole School Approaches

Bullying in British schools is now recognised as a serious problem and there is evidence from reported work in Sheffield and other LEAs that more and more schools are developing and implementing whole school policies. (Foster, Arora & Thompson. 1990., Yates & Smith. 1989., Stephenson & Smith. 1989. Maines and Robinson 1991.)

These are generally planned to:

* protect the victims through assertiveness training and open communication.
* develop a school ethos which gives clear messages that bullying will not be tolerated, that bullies will be punished and that victims will be protected.

At the same time schools persist in maintaining structures which might promote bullying. Teams and houses create the identity of groups. The members will belong only because others do not and they will support the identity of the group by strengthening the boundary around it. Are we expecting too much when we ask a young person to discriminate between winning on the sports field through superior strength and using the same strategy to win

power or possession in the playground? The very language of success, "I beat her, thrashed her, wiped the floor with her," is applauded if it refers to a "game" and punished if it refers to a "fight".

The challenge to school practice
Many of the strategies we use may be ineffective in changing the behaviour of the bully. We approach the situation with strong feelings of anger and frustration towards the bully and sympathy for the victim. We have a responsibility to the students and their parents to respond effectively and the measure of the success of our intervention has to be the degree to which it stops the bullying. Some of the responses often made by teachers are not successful in achieving this and we discuss them below. Please try and set aside any feelings of retribution towards the bully - your aim is not justice or morality; it is to change behaviour and thus achieve the best outcome for the victim.

Dangers of labelling
Although we use the terms "bully" and "victim" in this and other publications we do not think it is helpful to use them as labels in school. We know that to call a young person by any name must affect her self-image and must be difficult for parents to accept when we want to work co-operatively with them. We have heard of one London school where bullies are required to wear a badge saying, "I am a bully!" Is such a label likely to decrease or increase the bullying behaviour?

Getting to the bottom of it.
It seems like common sense to question students about facts and reasons when bad behaviour is brought to our attention. When we talk to the young people they often report that they give teachers the answers they want - the answers that will let them out of the room as soon as possible.

When you question young people about the facts they will give their own perspective and these are often contradictory, especially when a bully is trying to extract herself from blame. You may then be distracted from effective action in your quest for the truth.

Even less helpful is to ask students to explain why they behave in a certain way. It is very hard to explain our actions, maybe impossible in a way which will satisfy a teacher. We were recently told about a small pupil who undid the safety bolts on a climbing frame and his teacher asked him why he had done it. His predictable reply was, "Don't know, Miss." The teacher became frustrated and we asked her why she thought he had done it. "Because he is disturbed and attention seeking," she replied. Was the teacher really expecting the boy to reply....."Well, Miss, It is because I am disturbed.... ?"

Changing the victim

> *"You have to learn how to stand up for yourself," says my mother. "Don't let them push you around. Don't be spineless. You have to have more backbone."*
>
> *I think of sardines and their backbones. You can eat their backbones. The bones crumble between your teeth in one touch and they fall apart. This must be what my own backbone is like; hardly there at all. What is happening to me is my own fault, for not having more backbone.*
>
> **CATS EYE**
> **Margaret Attwood (1990).**

Over and over again we hear from victims that they are advised and urged to change their behaviour in some way, either by parents, teachers or through group work. They try to "stand up for themselves," "hit back," "walk away," "pretend you don't care," and each time their failure to act in a way which ends their misery just makes it worse. They feel it is their own fault that this is happening to them. It is not. Whatever their own inadequacy or

difficulty, it is not their fault and it is not their responsibility to stop it. It is our responsibility and we must give them that message loud and clear if we are not to compound their unhappiness.

There is nothing wrong with assertiveness training for everyone. There is plenty of benefit to be gained from social skills programmes for lots of students who are having difficulties in making relationships. However, these interventions should not be linked directly with the victim's plight but with more general developmental work

Punishment
Maybe the biggest challenge for us is to advise you to abandon punishment as a response to the bullies. We take a pragmatic approach and suggest that punishment simply does not work; in fact it will often make things worse when the bully takes further revenge on the victim.

If you want to encourage disclosure and you want to work positively with bullies then everyone in school must know that effective action will be taken but that it will not lead to punishment. We cannot agree with the following views.

In "Bullying - a practical guide to coping for schools," Eric Jones (1991) writes,

> *"Punish bullies. Record punishment and the reasons for it. Show him what you are putting on file and make it pay for whatever time it cost you to sort it out."*
>
> page 23.

and in another chapter John Pearce (1991) advises that when a bully is caught in the act we should respond by,

> *"Telling a bully that he or she will be dealt with later without specifying how or when can be very effective. The bully is likely to worry about what may happen..."*
>
> page 84.

Bullying is an antisocial behaviour resorted to by young people with inadequate or inappropriate social skills and we must respond in a way which will be helpful to their learning of improved behaviour. Increasing their anxiety and alienation from us is not likely to work!

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) gives schools the responsibility to ensure that

> **"In all actions concerning children.....the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (Article 3)**

The use of Power
Bullying seems to be a clash between the powerful and the powerless, but power is seen in many aspects of human behaviour. Bullying can be viewed as part of a normal process of socialisation in which the group establishes its identity which is reinforced by the exclusion of others. The strength of the group lies in its sense of cohesion and without somebody out-grouped - that is visibly outside the group, the boundaries are hard to define.

The use of power by the bully can be seen in the way the bully dominates and the reasons put forward, generic, family background, low self-esteem, poor social skills, gender differences, are not discussed in this article. Whatever the reason, we take the view that we have bullies and victims in school, and that this is not a healthy situation. We need to provide a safe environment for all, and we need to question our solutions to the problem. The use of power to stop the bully may confirm to the bully how power can be used to

intimidate the weak, and to suggest to the victim that they need to be more powerful, may leave them feeling even more powerless. The crucial element that we feel is overlooked in much of the research is the potentially pro-active role of those who observe and/or collude.

The Observer.
Though a sizeable minority of pupils may be victims or bullies, the majority of pupils will not be involved other than as observers. There is a need to make these pupils aware of the important role of a witness and to allow them to devise and practice safe interventions they might make.

A Whole School Approach.
Besag (1989) writes, "The whole school system should be organised to support all children and staff so that no one child or teacher is left alone to try to resolve a bullying problem." There seem to be two distinct approaches which need to be integrated in order to ensure that bullying is reduced

- a school environment where bullying is seen by all to be inappropriate
- help for victims and bullies.

The reader of books and articles on bullying will find a host of strategies and interventions planned to enhance the environment, develop the social and friendship setting of the school and supervise young people at play. These strategies will reduce the frequency of bullying but as young people feel safer they may report bullying incidents more frequently, hoping for effective interventions. This is where the enquiring teacher will be surprised to find that there is little advice available.

OUR APPROACH TO BULLYING BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL

Taking the view that bullying is an interaction which establishes group identity, dominance and status at the expense of another, then it is only by the development of "higher values" such as empathy, consideration, unselfishness, that the bully is likely to relinquish her behaviour and function differently in a social setting. If the preventive policy depends upon policing the environment, forbidding the behaviour, encouraging the victims and punishing the perpetrators then no lasting change can be expected.

The No Blame Approach

When bullying has been observed or reported then the following steps can be taken:

Step one - interview with the victim.
When the teacher finds out that bullying has happened she starts by talking to the victim about his feelings. She does not question him about the incidents but she does need to know who was involved.

Step two - convene a meeting with the people involved .
The teacher arranges to meet with the group of pupils who have been involved. This will include some bystanders or colluders who joined in but did not initiate any bullying. We find that a group of six to eight young people works well.

Step three - explain the problem.
She tells them about the way the victim is feeling and might use a poem, a piece of writing or a drawing to emphasise his distress. At no time does she discuss the details of the incidents or allocate blame to the group.

.Step four - share responsibility.
The teacher does not attribute blame but states that she knows that the group are responsible and can do something about it.

Step five - ask the group for their ideas.

Each member of the group is encouraged to suggest a way in which the victim could be helped to feel happier. The teacher gives some positive responses but she does not go on to extract a promise of improved behaviour.

Step six - leave it up to them.
The teacher ends the meeting by passing over the responsibility to the group to solve the problem. She arranges to meet with them again to see how things are going.

Step seven - meet them again.
About a week later the teacher discusses with each student, including the victim, how things have been going. This allows the teacher to monitor the bullying and keeps the young people involved in the process.

The results so far.
Since we began training teachers in this approach - November 1991, we have undertaken three separate evaluations of the usefulness of the programme from two perspectives:

1 Does the distress of the victim reduce after the intervention?

2 Do the users, mainly teachers, find the programme easy to use?

Study one
The initial evaluation was a questionnaire by interview in June 1992 of teachers trained in December 1991 and January 1992.

The results reported were as follows:

Primary success rate	8/8	
Secondary success rate		47/49
Further Education success rate		2/2

where success is defined as the teacher, having discussed the outcome with the victim, reports that the intervention was helpful or very helpful.

Study two
During the academic year 1993/4 teachers and pupils in seven schools were given a specific training in the method and careful interview procedures were tape-recorded with all participants after they had tried the approach. Transcripts are still undergoing analysis but an initial reading indicates that all teachers and pupils found the process easy to use and helpful. Some exceptionally happy outcomes were achieved for young people who had previously been very unhappy. Several teachers reported that the approach had led to an improved ethos in the class which affected friendships and relationships in general.

"I was sceptical about the whole thing (No Blame Approach) to start with, I was extremely sceptical, although having said that, when you made the point about how much of the stress was cut down on and the time investigating, I could relate to that because I've been through it. Then to see how in a very powerful way the change came from the group itself and how they were so willing to play their part and enjoyed playing their part..... they were all keen to say how much better things were.

I was excited by it, that's why I've continued to use it."

Head of Year - Comprehensive School May 1993

Study three
The No Blame Approach is supported by a training video and workbooks, Maines and Robinson (1992). A questionnaire was sent to 100 schools which had bought the materials.

In order to collect useful data the paperwork was quite substantial which might explain the poor returns - only 13 which included one stating that the LEA did not participate in any data collection and one which was incomplete. Reports came from 2 middle, 1 junior and 8 secondary schools reporting on 46 separate incidents.

In all instances the approach was rated as successful; [in one case the sequence was repeated as the effect was not immediate.]

Of the eleven schools all described the approach positively; very good [3], positive [4], incredibly successful [1], very effective [1], very useful [2].

Ten schools reported an increase in willingness on the part of staff to tackle the problem with confidence.

Five schools involved parents in 16 of the interventions.

Consideration of these evaluations

There has been no attempt to compare the data with that which might be obtained from a control group for whom another intervention was used. The authors did not wish to encourage the use of interventions which might be less helpful or even harmful so a control group for which

* no intervention
* punishment of aggressors

could not be justified for ethical reasons.

The only other intervention which might provide a satisfactory comparative group might be the group using the Common Concern Method. [Pikas 1989]. The success of this method has been evaluated in the Sheffield Project {to be published; Smith and Sharpe 1994} and a 70% success rate is described. The two approaches have some similarities but the No Blame Approach does not require such an intense training programme and is much less time consuming to implement.

Another consideration might be that since the victim is likely to disclose distress at a time of crisis, there may be a natural improvement regardless of any intervention. Whilst we acknowledge this to be true, the idea that an adult might respond to the disclosure with an assurance that "it will probably get better soon." would be unacceptable to most teachers and parents.

It is important to see this intervention as a part of a whole programme which includes strategies which will reduce the frequency of bullying and which makes a clear statement to the staff, students and the community that bullying is taken seriously and is not acceptable. The school community will not allow young people to suffer because of the unkind behaviour of others. Whenever it is reported then the group will accept the responsibility to put it right.

Controversy

This method of working with young people is not universally accepted by other professional in the field who favour a punitive response to the bullies.

"It seems to me that the no blame approach will only reinforce the attitudes of joy-riders, lager louts, muggers and others like them, who ultimately take no blame ..... for the consequences of their actions."
Dr Michele Elliott, Director, Kidscape. Sunday Times Letters, 14/11/93

The No Blame Approach is sometimes misunderstood as a "soft" option. This could not be further from the truth... to ask young people to take this responsibility is a tough and very grown-up demand. The imposition of punitive interventions is the soft option leaving the young person in a position of childish dependence upon adult methods of control.

Some reports from colleagues who have tried out the no blame approach.
Many of our colleagues have tried out the intervention and we have heard lots of encouraging reports of its success. A few are recorded below. There have been some slight modifications made to the plan, either because the approach was not explained carefully enough, or because some changes seemed to suit the style of that teacher. For example, a primary school headteacher took the victim in to meet with the group of bullies. This is fine if the victim is robust enough and willing to speak for himself.

A primary school headteacher.
I found the strategy quite difficult in terms of my own attitudes: Resisting the temptation to blame and tell-off bullies does not come easily! The children took it all in their stride and relationships were not damaged by the process - no recriminations were observed, as no one had been "got into trouble". In terms of time expended the process was very economical - no more than an hour being -spent on it in total. And yet the results have been quite staggering. There has been no recurrence of the problem whatsoever, and about six months have passed now. It seems to have been about the nearest thing possible to a "Magic Aspirin" for bullying! All I need now is for another incident of bullying to occur so that I can try it again!

A comprehensive school deputy head
Each time the empathy method has been used it has worked, it takes time but no more so than collating individual statements from pupils. Also, we have had no parental come-back either in terms of positive or negative feedback. It would appear everyone just feels relieved!.

A parent of a nine year old boy
My boy was a victim of school bullying and when he came home he used to behave in a very nasty way towards his younger brother - as though he was taking it out on someone weaker. The school used the no blame approach and things changed for my son. Now he is happy to go into school and he is also much nicer to be with at home. I am really in favour of this method and I don't think punishing the bullies would have worked as well.

Responding to the "Yes... but... !"

<u>You are not seen to be taking strong action - what will parents, pupils, colleagues, think?</u>
A school which has a clear, written policy on its anti-bullying procedures is not likely to incur disapproval from the community. In our experience most dissatisfaction arises when teachers do not take parental complaints seriously or when they respond by blaming the victim: - "It's six of one and half a dozen...", "She doesn't do much to help herself."

We have attended several parents meetings and explained the "no blame approach" and the reaction has been very positive. Parents of victims may have feelings of revenge and anger but when we reassure them that something will be done we find they agree that the most important thing is to stop the bullying.

<u>What do you do if there is a serious incident of violence?</u>
When a pupil is seriously assaulted by another then the usual sanctions must be applied, even calling the police if appropriate. This does not mean that the "no blame approach" cannot be tried as well since the particular incident of violence would not be discussed. The issue addressed is the misery of the victim and how that might be alleviated.

<u>Surely you need to know exactly what went on?</u>
It is only necessary to know that bullying is happening and to have the names of the young people involved. Any attempts to take accurate accounts about the events are likely to stir up further disputes, to increase hostility towards the victims and to waste a lot of time because the "truth" may be hard to find and may vary from one person's perspective to another.

Bullying is a complex process and you are not likely to discover all its ramifications and certainly not all its causes by questioning the participants.

What if only one bully is involved?
We believe that it is very rare that bullying takes place in real isolation - there is nearly always some knowledge and even consent from a group, even if they disapprove and refuse to join in. Secret bullying of one person by another is rare and hard to discover but if it is revealed then the "no blame approach" might still be tried. A peer group could be given the opportunity to help put things right, even if they have not been involved in the unhappiness.

It might be worth considering whether interventions planned on child protection programmes might be helpful for these situations since they may apply to abuse of an individual by another who is not a member of the peer group.

What if the bully is seriously disturbed?
Pupils with seriously maladaptive behaviours should be helped in the usual way. The "no blame approach" is planned to stop bullying, not to treat pathology. Any individual who is involved in this process may be offered other additional interventions or referred for specialist advice as necessary.

What about victims that provoke bullying? Why can't we help the victim directly?
Some victims may display behaviours which appear to encourage bullying from their peers. Any young person who has poor social and friendship skills or who is very unassertive should be offered help and support in order to learn appropriate social interaction. This should not be implied as a responsibility to stop the bullying for themselves.

When the group convenes to discuss the plight of the victim someone may suggest that he or she is encouraged to behave in a different way... "we could ask her to stop..." That is fine as long as the group take the responsibility to help her and the changes are within her ability.

Conclusion
Bullying is a serious problem which spoils the lives and learning of a significant number of young people in schools. It is time to stop collecting the data on frequency. Bullying does occur in all schools. Preventive approaches will reduce it but it will still happen and teachers need to know how to deal with it when it does.

The No Blame Approach seems almost too simple and it is hard for teachers to let go of the traditional ways of dealing with the behaviour - interrogation and punishment. However, the students and parents tell us that all they care about is that the behaviour stops and this intervention achieves just that.

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